

## United States Senate

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December 9, 2005

Representative Richard W. Pombo  
Chairman  
Committee on Resources  
United States House of Representatives  
1324 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington DC 20515

Dear Richard,

I write to urge you to please withdraw your proposal to radically change mining laws on America's public lands from the spending reconciliation bill. Although you seem to believe this proposal is mining reform, your sweeping changes could lead to dramatic and potentially devastating impacts on these lands as well as shortchange America's taxpayers.

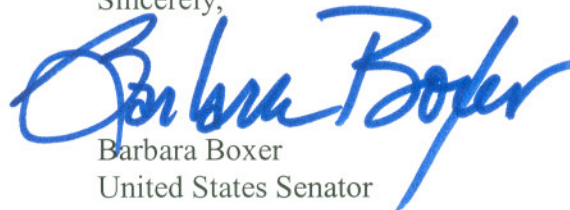
Your proposal puts at risk millions of acres of public land in the West. It ends the longstanding ban on new mining patents, allowing land long held for the American people, some of which could be worth billions of dollars, to be easily transferred to private interests for a fraction of its actual value. Additionally, private interests would no longer be required to prove that there is a valuable mineral deposit in order to stake a mining claim on federal land. In fact, under your proposal, they would not even need to use the land for extracting minerals; they would be able to use these public lands to build condos or strip-malls. Further, companies would have the right to purchase for a nominal price public lands contiguous to mining claims and patents, grabbing even more federal land for development.

Richard, these concerns are shared by leading public lands professionals. Indeed, the former Nevada state director of the Bureau of Land Management, recently wrote that the results of this proposal would be "catastrophic, both environmentally and economically" and that it was "bad for American taxpayers." Three former Forest Service Chiefs wrote that the effects of the legislation on our public lands could be "potentially dramatic." Further, 19 law professors from around the country—all experts in natural resources law—declared that your proposal "could have devastating effects on federal land management and policy."

In addition, the language eliminates the federal government's duty to investigate, disclose, and clean up contamination on land conveyed under the proposal. This threatens public health by, among other things, reducing the amount of information available on contamination, and allowing the contamination to potentially grow worse without the knowledge of the future owner. This sweeping waiver of federal responsibility is without justification.

Richard, you and I are fortunate to hail from California, a state of striking beauty and rich with the natural heritage of our public lands. As elected officials, we are charged to be faithful stewards of that heritage. To that end, I again implore you to withdraw your proposal and to avoid any attempts, intentional or not, to pawn off America's public lands for a pittance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Barbara Boxer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Barbara" and last name "Boxer" clearly distinguishable.

Barbara Boxer  
United States Senator